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# PHOP a Safety Net for Navy and Marine Corps Reservists' Psychological Health

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U.S. Navy and Marine Corps reservists are dedicated service members who serve their country while activated just the same as full-time active duty service members do. Sometimes they feel as though they are an overlooked population, but in my current role, my team and I work every day to ensure they get the same quality of care with regards to their mental health as any other service member because their sacrifices are no less great. As the Psychological Health Outreach Program (PHOP) Project Manager (PM) for Serco, I work with U.S. Navy and Marine Corps reservists as well as their families to help them adjust to life at home after serving overseas.

Reservists returning from deployments in support of overseas contingency operations face unique

challenges that can cause increased stress in their lives and exacerbate deployment stress injuries such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injuries. Reservists, even more than the active duty service members, face immense cultural changes after completing a deployment.

To address these issues, the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) developed PHOP in 2008. Our mission is to ensure that reservists have full access to appropriate psychological health care services, to facilitate recovery, and to increase resiliency, which is essential to maintaining a ready military force.

It is my responsibility to provide administrative and clinical oversight to ensure the smooth running of the program including coordinating information sharing, training and providing clinical consultation to the staff on a daily basis, as well as coordinating with the BUMED Director of Psychological Health Reserve Programs. However, my most important responsibility is to provide support to the Outreach team members.

The PHOP program at full capacity has 55 staff, covers six regions and spans 11 Navy and Marine Corps Reserve sites throughout the United States. Our teams consist of 4-5 licensed

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mental health counselors embedded at each of the five Navy Reserve RCCs and six geographically-centered MFR Home Training Centers (HTCs).

PHOP is primarily marketed as a “safety net for psychological health,” but to really understand what we do, you have to think of psychological health in the very broadest sense possible—outside the traditional psychological support box. If there is anything that can impact a reservist or their family either positively or negatively, or anything that can support or detract from their readiness, we can assist them. Given that, I can honestly say that our extraordinarily dedicated professional PHOP teams do amazing things to support their overall psychological health. The psychological needs of reservists and their families often go way beyond the usual perception of mental health treatment, so our team members sometimes have to travel the road with them and find that it is filled with concrete needs and stressors that need to be alleviated before the traditional psychological or mental health treatment efforts can even begin.

PHOP work also has a bit of an investigatory component to it. The staff always listens with their whole being to ensure that they can really hear what the client is saying, as well as what he/she is not saying. This holistic strategy of care also requires the PHOP Teams to assess for physical, behavioral and cognitive indicators of stress. But...just as important I think is that the staff listen with their hearts and use their intuitive feelings and good faith efforts on the behalf of their clients. And it is these gut feelings and good faith efforts that in some cases have saved lives.

The PHOP teams are an awesome and dynamic group of professionals. There is a PHOP staff member to fit the comfort level of every client. In times of societal depression, the demand for helping professionals providing quality human services is way above average. So, collaborating with everyone to ensure the clients are getting their needs met is a constant reward.

This job truly encompasses every skill set I've been fortunate enough to acquire throughout my professional career. For example, I might use my administrative, psychoanalytic, professoriate and research skills all in one day. I might deliver a corporate presentation on PHOP services, provide web-based training to the staff on client management, facilitate a clinical consultation teleconference, and then review several months' worth of data to identify relevant trends. For some people, my day might sound too busy, but to a born multi-tasker like me...it's a perfect fit.

The program was developed by the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) and the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves in response to an important need that was not being addressed—and now provides a vital safety net for the psychological health of the Reserves—both Navy and Marine Corps. We have received hundreds of personal stories from commands and clients (Reservists and family members) about how our PHOP teams have helped their lives in so many ways both personally and for their family and military readiness. I hope that our involvement and outreach can continue to help not only in maintaining resilience but in supporting personal and family growth and development.

**For further information on the PHOP program or for contact information visit <http://www.navyreserve.navy.mil/pages/phop.aspx>**

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